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ABSTRACT

College students who live on campus are often assigned a roommate whom they do not know and are expected to live with that person in intimate quarters. This study was conducted to examine the process of relationship development in 13 pairs of college freshwomen roommates. For 8 weeks each semester of their freshman year, roommates independently completed a weekly questionnaire on the two most important events that occurred between them and their roommate. Toward the end of each semester, they also completed measures of conflict, conflict resolution, and emotional involvement with their roommate. A follow-up interview was conducted during subjects' second year of college. The results revealed that conflicts were most frequently reported regarding room cleanliness, study hours, and how often the other asked for a favor. Emotional involvement was high for both semesters, but it decreased second semester, especially in perceptions of the other's disclosure and in one's own caring. By second semester, compatible roommates were more likely to report high emotional involvement than were less compatible roommates. Comflict also increased across semesters in number of conflicts, frequency, and importance. By second semester, compatible roommates were less likely to experience conflict. Living together the second year was predicted by compatibility, whereas emotional involvement and conflict predicted type of future interaction. (NB)

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COMPATIBILITY, CONFLICT, AND EMOTIONAL INVOLVEMENT IN COLLEGE FRESHWOMEN ROOMMATES

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CG 020370

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Compatibility, Conflict and Emotional Involvement in College Freshwomen Roommates

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The purpose of this study was to examine the process of relationship development in college freshwomen pairs by assessing their weekly interaction, conflicts and conflict resolution, and emotional involvement during their first year in college. The data from thirteen pairs of roommates who completed both semesters of the study form the basis for this paper.

Conflicts were most frequently reported to occur regarding room cleanliness, study hours, and how often the other asks for favors. Least important areas of conflict were differences in musical tastes and furniture arrangement. A content analysis of "most important events" showed that conflicts were mentioned 87 times (9.4% of the total events). Only 29% of these conflicts were perceived as having positive outcomes.

By second semester, compatibility was strongly and inversely associated with conflict for both semesters in number of conflict areas, their frequency, importantce, and intensity. Compatible roommates reported fewer unilateral attempts to solve conflicts than less compatible ones. Compatible roommates also showed greater emotional involvement second semester than less compatible ones.

COMPATIBILITY, CONFLICT, AND EMOTIONAL INVOLVEMENT

IN COLLEGE FRESHWOMEN PAIRS

Marylyn Rands, Ph.D., Wheaton College

The purpose of this study was to examine the process of relationship development in college roommates by assessing their weekly interaction, conflicts and conflict resolution, and emotional involvement during their first year in college. Participants were 13 randomly selected pairs. For eight weeks each semester, roommates independently completed a weekly questionnaire that asked for "the two most important events that occurred between you and your roommate." Toward the end of each semester, they completed the other measures. A followup interview the second year asked about living together and the current relationship.

Emotional involvement was high both semesters, but it decreased second semester, especially in perceptions of the other's disclosure and in one's own caring. By second semester, compatible roommates were more likely to report high emotional involvement than less compatible ones.

Conflict also increased across semesters in number, frequency, and importance. By second semester, compatible roommates were less likely to experience conflict.

Living together the second year was predicted by compatibility, whereas emotional involvement and conflict predicted type of future interaction. Recommendations for future studies are made regarding method and content.

COMPATIBILITY, CONFLICT, AND EMOTIONAL INVOLVEMENT IN COLLEGE FRESHWOMEN ROOMMATES

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Most theories of relationship development assume a progression in partners' emotional closeness, intimacy, and mutual interdependence (e. g., Levinger & Snoek, 1972; Levinger, 1983). This progression is thought to occur as partners discover their similarities, reveal their attitudes and feelings, and engage in mutually rewarding social exchange. If one or both fail to obtain what they are seeking from the other, the relationship may remain superficial or deteriorate altogether. These models implicitly assume that persons are free to choose those who will be their friends and that they can end a relationship at will.

College roommates are in a peculiar position: They are assigned a roommate whom they generally do not know; then, they are expected to live with this person in particularly intimate quarters, with little hope of escaping that person's presence for several months. This situation creates a "hothouse" of relationship development that speeds up relationship processes. While we cannot assume that roommate relationships are typical of others that form more spontaneously, nonetheless, roommates have many of the same expectations for each other that friends do in other

circumstances, and go through similar processes of developing emotional closeness, compatibility, and conflict (c.f., Newcomb, 1961).

This study was anchored in a recent conceptualization by Kelley and his colleagues (Kelley, Berscheid, Christensen, Harvey, Huston, Levinger, McClintock, Peplau, & Peterson, 1983). In this model, close relationships are defined as those of strong, frequent, and diverse interdependence that lasts over a considerable period of time" (p. 38). Interdependence is when partners mutually affect each other's thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. A "close relationship," then, does not necessarily imply postive feelings. This model of relationships emphasizes analysis of ongoing interaction itself, rather than partners' generalized feelings about each other.

The Kelley et al. model conceptualizes relationship variables at different levels, and the present study consciously selected its variables to represent some of these different levels (see Huston & Robins, 1982). Some are macrolevel, "causal conditons" (Kelley, et al., 1983) that are presumed to affect interaction (e.g., personal similarity); some are microlevel variables, measures of the interaction itself (e.g., compatibility); and others are intermediate level "outcome" variables (e.g., emotional involvement; conflict). Outcome variables may in turn influence variables that were important earlier in the

developmental process. The model thus attempts to account for the dynamic, constantly changing quality of human relationships.

When roommates move in together, they bring with them certain experiences or qualities that may affect their interaction. These factors, or causal conditions, are background factors, such as demographic characteristics, personal traits, and so on. For example, certain kinds of similarity may smooth the initial interaction, allowing roommates to feel at ease with each other and to begin to share feelings about college life. This sharing may lead roommates to develop positive feelings for each other. It may not, however; even roommates from similar backgrounds, for example, may find they do not agree on use of the dorm room or on friends sleeping over. These disagreements could accelerate and negatively affect any subsequent interaction. Similarity, then, does not guarantee smooth interaction, but it could facilitate it, at least in the beginning.

This study of freshwomen focused primarily on the development of compatibility and emotional closeness. These two variables are conceptually independent (Levinger & Rands, 1984). That is, a relationship can be emotionally close and compatible (which is probably our implicit model of friendship); it can be close, but incompatible (as when two persons care for each other, but do not get along well);

it can be distant and compatible (as in many collegial or other work relationships); or it can be distant and incompatible (a type of relationship that is expected to dissolve, but might not do so in the externally-controlled roommate situation). Close and compatible or distant and imcompatible relationships are probably most frequent for college roommates.

Smooth interaction is the main characteristic of relationship compatibility, the extent to which roommates facilitate each other's goals in their daily and long-term interaction (Levinger & Rands, 1984). We should expect a positive association between similarity and compatibility, because persons who are similar, who share backgrounds or social norms, are able to predict each other's behavior and respond accordingly.

A third variable in this study was conflict. Interpersonal conflict is considered normal in human relationships; two partners' interests seldom coincide perfectly at all times. How conflict is resolved, however, can become critical in relationship development (e.g., Gottman, 1979; Rands, Levinger, & Mellinger, 1981; Raush, Barry, Hertel, & Swain, 1979). Constructive conflict resolution can result in increased partner satisfaction, whereas destructive conflict resolution can cause difficulties to escalate and partners to leave the

relationship. Conflict resolution can be handled jointly (e.g., through discussion); unilaterally (where one person makes a decision or takes action); or it can be avoided (where the conflict is ignored or the partners refuse to talk about it). Presumably, joint conflict resolution is superior to the other modes, providing the potential for mutual understanding, and avoidance is the least effective, giving no opportunity for relationship growth, and even perhaps contributing to silent resentments that undermine the relationship.

This study looked at the development of roommate relationships across time. College roommates generally develop a "close" relationship, though not necessarily a postive one. Although some roommates may know each other before they begin to room together, the majority do not, and even those wo do know each other may not be that familiar with the other person's living habits. Roommates must quickly develop patterns of interaction that enable them to live together. The relationship processes that occur more naturally in other relationships are accelerated for roommates. This study looked at relationship development in pairs of college freshwomen by assessing their weekly interaction, conflicts and conflict resolution, and emotional involvement during their first year in college.

Emotional involvement between compatible roommates is presumed to increase across time (Levinger, 1983; Levinger & Rands, 1984). When behavioral interaction is facilitative, rather than interfering (our definition of compatibility), partners are likely to feel more positive about the relationship, to feel more attachment and caring for each other and to disclose more about themselves (e.g., Levinger, Rands, & Talaber, 1979; Rubin, 1974). They are also likely to experience less conflict and to want to continue their relationship into the future.

These assumptions were tested in a study of freshwomen roommates during their first year at Wheaton College, a small, predominantly residential liberal arts college for women near Boston. The study had roommates assess their interaction weekly and their conflicts, conflict resolution, and emotional involvement once each semester.

Method

Respondents

Twenty-four freshwomen roommate pairs at Wheaton College were randomly selected to participate in this study. The data presented are based on 13 pairs who completed the study for two semesters during the academic year 1984-85. Roommate assignments at Wheaton are based on students' similarity in responses to questions regarding smoking and drinking, study habits, overnight guests, and so on. Typically roommates do not know each other before rooming together.

Procedure

For eight weeks each semester, participants independently completed a weekly questionnaire that asked for a detailed description of "the two most important events that occurred between you and your roommate during the past week." These events were rated for their degree of positivity or negativity.

Toward the end of each semester, participants also rated their conflict with their roommate (its type, frequency and importance) and their emotional involvement (self-disclosure, caring, attachment, uniqueness). Other measures assessed ways of dealing with specific conflicts, attributions of responsibility for conflicts, demographic and personal similarity, and a variety of other issues. Each roommate was paid $20 for her participation.

Measures

Three measures of compatibility were calculated: the Compatibility Ratio, Demographic Similarity, and Personal Similarity. The Compatibility Ratio was based on individual reports of the most significant interactions with their roommate (two per week for eight weeks each semester). Roommates rated each event for its degree of positivity or negativity on a 7-point scale ranging from -3 (very negative) to +3 (very positive). The number of positive events was the measure of facilitation (F), whereas the

number of negative events was the measure of interference (I). Neutral events were ignored. The Compatibilitiy Ratio was calculated by dividing the number of positive events by the sum of both positive and negative events (F/F+I). The demoninator (F+I) can be conceived as relationship intensity, and so the ratio is actually the proportion of positive interactions within a sample of intense interactions. The higher the Compatibility Ratio, the more positive the interaction (see Rands, 1987).

Separate indices were calculated for each semester to see how first semester interaction compared to second semester. The average (Compatibility Ratio was .87 each semester, indicating that interaction was predominantly positive. On the other hand, the Pearson correlation between the two semesters was only .22 (n.s.), indicating that interaction patterns were not necessarily similar across time for specific partners.

Demographic similarity was calculated by summing the number of demographic items on which subjects reported similarity. There were 11 items on the questionnaire (type of high school, religion, ethnic background, race, birth order, male sibling, female sibling, father's SES and education, mother's employment status and education. Demographic similarity ranged from 3 to 7 items, with a median of 4.5.

Personal similarity was calculated by summing a number of personal items on which respondents reported similarity. There were eight items (sexual preference, age, high school GPA, popularity, being typical Wheaton students, being a jock, scholar or both, dependence on parents, activity level at Wheaton). Personal similarity was calculated for each semester, since some of these factors could change; however, there was no difference between means (5.5 each semester) and the correlation was high ($r = .53$, $df = 24$, $p < .003$), so only first semester ratings are used here.

Conflict between roommates was measured with a "Problem Inventory" (modified from Levinger, Hickman, & Rezig, 1983) that asked for judgments about the number, frequency, and importance of 24 areas of potential conflict common to roommate relationships (e.g., sharing things, whether a boyfriends should stay overnight, respecting privacy, and so on). Four variables were calculated: "Number of Conflict Areas" is the count of items on which a roommate reports conflict (0-24). "Frequency of Conflict" was rated for each item on a 5-point scale from 0 (never) to 4 (very often); scores were summed and could range from 0 to 96. "Importance of Conflict" was rated on a 3-point scale ranging from 1 (not important) to 3 (very important); scores were summed and could range from 1-72. "Intensity of Conflict" was calculated by summing the products of the

Frequency and Importance ratings. Ratings were made once each semester, and thus represent a global, macrolevel, index of conflict.

Emotional involvement was measured once each semester. This score is based on a 20-item involvement scale (modified from Levinger, Rands, & Talaber, 1977; and Rubin, 1974). These items represent self-disclosure, caring, attachment, and relationship uniqueness. Perceptions of the roommate's self-disclosure and caring were also measured. These items were rated on 9-point scales ranging from 0 (disagree comletely) to 8 (agree completely). Scores could range from 0 to 160.

Roommates were asked to estimate the number of hours of leisure time they spent together with their roommate each week. The average amount of leisure time together did not increase significantly over the two semesters (25.77 hours versus 22.54 hours). The correlation between the two semesters was .38 ($df = 24$, $p < .03$), indicating that roommates continued to spend about the same amount of time together after the semester break as before.

Roommates were asked to rate their satisfaction with their roommate as a roommate on a 5-point scale ranging from 0 (not at all satisfied) to 4 (very satisfied). Satisfaction did not change across semesters, averaging 3.69 in the fall and 3.58 in the spring. These measures were positively correlated ($r = .33$, $df = 24$, $p = .05$).

Results

Emotional Involvement

Overall, roommates were quite emotionally involved, scoring above the neutral point each semester. It was expected that Emotional Involvement would increase across time; however, the average score was 127.15 first semester and 118.23 second semester, out of a possible range of 160 points. The decrease in emotional involvement across time is marginally significant ($t_{(25)} = 1.97$, $p < .06$).

To examine the nature of this decrease in involvement, subscale scores were calculated (see Appendix I) and comparisons made (using t-tests) between Time 1 and Time 2. Figure 1 shows the results of these tests. The variable that accounts for most of the drop in involvement is the rater's perception of her roommate's self-disclosure; roommates are perceived to disclose less about themselves during the second semester than the first ($p < .001$). There is a trend for one's own disclosure also to decrease ($p < .09$).

Insert Figure 1 about here

Caring for each other also decreased slightly across semesters. This decrease was marginally significant for one's own caring ($p < .07$), and showed a weak trend for one's roommate's caring ($p < .12$).

There was no change in one's feeling of attachment to the roommate, supporting the theory that attachment lingers after other ties have been weakened (e.g., Weiss, 1975). Nor was there a change in believing that one's relationship with the roommate is unique.

Why would roommate relationships become less emotionally involved over time, instead of more so? One explanation is that they have already fulfilled their major function, which is to help the individual through her first few months of college. The roommate is the most convenient person on campus. She can be a friend, a model for social comparison, a companion for leisure time, a confidant, and a source of emotional support. As time goes on, however, other friendships are made, confidence grows in academic ability, and the roommate no longer needs to be the primary source of companionship or social comarison. These ties weaken as other, more freely chosen, ties are built.

A second explanation is that roommates begin to disengage emotionally as they approach the end of the second semester as a defense against the separation each must face as they make plans to go away for the summer.

Roommate Conflict

Conflict was assessed using a 24-item scale listing common disagreements between roommates. Each respondent completed this scale at the end of each semester, rating the

number of conflicts, their frequency of occurrence and their importance. An intensity index was created by summing the products of frequency and importance.

Conflict areas. Table 1 shows the top 17 conflict areas grouped according to intuitive judgment categories. The first number in each column represents the percentage of roommates who reported a particular conflict at leat once during the semester. The second number in each column shows the percentage of roommates who, having experienced this conflict, also considered it fairly or very important. The two semesters are compared.

Conflicts that occur with consistently high frequency across semesters are room cleanliness, asking for favors, types of favors asked, sharing things, using the phone, musical tastes, the function of the room for studying or partying, and spending time with each other.

Some conflicts became more common across time. Those with the largest increase are sleep or nap times, the function of the room for studying or partying, and spending time with each other.

Table 1

Most Important Conflicts

CONFLICT AREA	Semester 1 Percentage of Respondents (N = 26)		Semester 2 Percentage of Respondents (N = 26)	
	Have this Conflict	Say Conflict is Important	Have this Conflict	Say Conflict is Important
Room Maintenance				
Room cleanliness	38	(29)	41	(38)
Decorating the room	28	(44)	16	(20)
Rearranging the furniture	34	(18)	22	(29)
Courtesy				
Asking for favors	38	(58)	34	(73)
Types of favors asked	25	(75)	31	(80)
Sharing things	31	(60)	28	(67)
Using the phone	31	(50)	31	(50)
Respecting privacy	22	(86)	19	(83)
Sleep or nap times	28	(33)	38	(83)
Musical tastes	44	(29)	31	(38)
Social Life				
When/how long friends visit	28	(56)	16	(20)
Function of room for studying/partying	28	(78)	34	(73)
Whether boyfriend stays overnight	19	(100)	19	(75)
Spending time with each other	25	(75)	31	(100)
When/how long boyfriend visits	19	(83)	16	(60)
Types of friends	28	(44)	22	(57)
Academic Life				
Study hours	25	(100)	25	(100)

A conflict can occur frequently, but not be considered important; or it can be important, but not occur frequently. Frequent conflict areas of relatively low importance are room cleanliness and musical tastes. Conflict areas reported infrequently, but considered important when they do occur, are whether a boyfriend should stay overnight, when or how long boyfriends visit, types of friends, and study hours. Three other areas, not shown in the table because of their low frequency, also fall into this last category: cigarette smoking, whether a friend should stay overnight, and taking messages.

Some types of conflict become less important across time and others become more important. Becoming less important are decorating the room, when or how long friends visit, and when or how long boyfriends visit (although this continues to be of relatively high importance). Language, such as slang or dialect (not shown) also falls into this category.

Becoming more important are room cleanliness, rearranging the furniture, asking for favors, types of favors asked, sharing things, sleep or nap times, and types of friends.

These changes show roommates' accomodation to differences (e.g., in music, friends), reflecting, perhaps, either an increasing tolerance for diversity or a trend

toward similarity. Other differences continue to require negotiation (e.g., function of the room, boyfriend's visits), perhaps because they impact more severely on the individual's own routines or studying. Courtesy continues to remain important, and it would seem that roommates who share common values about courtesy would experience more harmonious relationships.

Other conflict indices. Figure 2 shows changes across the semesters on the four measures of conflict derived from individual's reports of their disagreements with their roommate. (Note that the potential range of each measure varies, and so comparisons between indices are not possible.) Conflict Intensity (a general measure that combines frequency and importance), shows a significant increase in conflict across semesters. Number of Conflict Areas and Conflict Importance show trends toward significance, while Frequency is marginally significant.

Insert Figure 2 about here

Conflict resolution. Roommates were asked to describe in detail up to three of their conflicts and how they were resolved. Their responses were categorized into three types of conflict resolution, joint resolution, unilateral resolution, or avoidance. There were no differences in

frequency of using these strategies across time, so both semesters are combined here. Joint resolution strategies were described most frequently (an average of .96 events), and avoidance least frequently (.23 events, $\underline{t}(25) = 4/71$. $p < .001$). Unilateral strategies were intermediate (.73 events), which is not significantly less frequent than joint strategies, but is more frequent than avoidance ($\underline{t}_{(25)} = 2.69$, $p < .01$).

Respondents also rated the success of their resolution strategy for each conflict on a scale ranging from 0 (not at all successful) to 4 (very successful). A chi square on these data showed that joint strategies were more successful than either unilateral or avoidance strategies (Chi square$_{(8)}$ = 44.54, Semester 1; 24.38, Semester 2; $p < .01$).

These findings support our expectation that joint resolution strategies are most successful; however, because roommates choose which disagreements to report, there may have been a bias toward selecting either those with successful outcomes or those where partners used joint strategies. When there is discussion about an issue, because this is a joint process, roommates may simply remember these conflicts better, and they may not consider times they avoided a confrontation by giving in as being disagreements. To control for this bias, it would be necessary to require regular reports of disagreements and how they were solved, and to make clear exactly what a disagreement or conflict could be.

Responsibility for conflict. Roommates were also asked to make attributions of responsibility for each of their disagreements. A summary of these attributions is shown in Table 2 for joint, unilateral, and avoidance solutions. The ratings reflect the average percentage of responsibility assigned to the self, to the roommate, to their joint interaction, and to external factors.

Table 2

Attributions of Responsibility for Conflict

Conflict Resolution Strategy	ATTRIBUTION			
	Self	Roommate	Joint	External Environment
JOINT				
Semester 1	38.75[a]	39.82	21.07	11.07
Semester 2	22.96	39.27	35.86	1.77
Average	30.84	39.54	28.46	6.42
UNILATERAL				
Semester 1	49.06	27.19	15.94	7.81
Semester 2	38.75	37.50	11.75	11.00
Average	43.90	32.34	13.84	9.40
AVOIDANCE				
Semester 1	37.86	35.00	17.86	9.29
Semester 2	31.00	55.00	9.00	5.00
Average	34.43	45.00	13.43	7.14
TOTAL AVERAGE	36.40	38.96	18.58	7.65

[a] The numbers refer to the percent of responsibility attributed to each source.

The average of totals in the bottom row shows that about equal responsibility was given to the self and the roommate for disagreements, with less assigned to joint interaction or to external factors. It is interesting to note, however, that by second semester, those who use joint problem-solving techniques perceive the roommate as more responsible than the self; both semesters they attribute more responsibility to their joint interaction than those using other strategies. It may be that part of the decision to confront a partner in order to solve a problem jointly requires perceiving the conflict as due as much to the other person as to the self.

Those who use unilateral strategies--who try to solve the problem on their own, by compromising, for example, give themselves more responsibility and their partners less, at least in the first semester. But by second semester, they have shifted some of that responsibility to their roommate. The meaning of a unilateral approach may differ from the beginning of a relationship, when knowledge of the other is less certain, and later, when one knows the other better. In the beginning, it might seem appropriate to blame oneself for conflicts, whereas later on the other may be seen at fault, also, especially if unilateral attempt to resolve conflict have not been successful.

Those who avoid confronting problems shift much of the responsibility to their roommates by second semester. It would be interesting to explore the nature of these attributions. Did respondents expect their roommates to mindread their wishes and unhappiness over disagreements? Did they feel their roommates were insensitive and uncooperative and would therefore be unwilling to negotiate their conflicts? Or do people who avoid conflict come to feel less effective, and thus less responsible?

There is a pattern for all respondents to come to see themselves as less responsible over time; it is only those using joint strategies, however, who shift that responsibility to their joint interaction, rather than to the partner herself. The ability to comprehend the meaning of joint responsibility may depend on experience and sophistication. It is likely that in talking about problems, the contributions of each partner become clearer. Interaction style itself becomes apparent as a help or a hindrance, as facilitative or interfering. Engaging in joint interaction to resolve conflicts makes the dynamics of joint interaction more salient.

Roommate Compatibility

The compatibility data were analyzed using Pearson correlations. Because of the exploratory nature of this study, p values greater than .05 are reported when a trend is indicated. All correlations in the following section were based on 26 cases.

Measures of compatibility. Compatibility showed no change across semesters on any of the three measures. Demographic Similarity, by definition, does not change, and neither did Personal Similarity. The Compatibility Ratio did not change on the average, though the correlation between semesters was low (.22, n.s.), showing that it did change for individuals, with some becoming more compatible in their everyday interaction, and others less.

Demographic Similarity was uncorrelated with either Personal Similarity or the Compatibility Ratio. Nor did demographic similarity relate in any meaningful way to the other variables in the study.

Personal Similarity was positively correlated with the Compatibility Ratio, showing that those who are more similar also have more favorable interactions, and this correlation became stronger by the second semester (.36, $p < .04$ versus .57, $p < .001$). This supports the expectation that personal similarity, a macrolevel background variable, will smooth the way toward harmony of interaction, a microlevel variable.

Compatibility and conflict. Both the Compatibility Ratio and Personal Similarity were correlated with the conflict indices (see Table 2). The differences between the two measures are intriguing for a theory of relationship development. From the beginning, the Compatibility Ratio was correlated with conflict; when daily interaction was primarily positive, less conflict was experienced. By second semester, these correlations were even stronger.

Table 2

Correlations between Conflict and Compatibility

		MEASURE OF COMPATIBILITY	
Conflict Index	Semester	F/I Ratio (Semester 2)	Personal Similarity
Number of Conflicts	1	-.37 (.03)[a]	--
	2	-.38 (.03)	-.40 (.02)
Frequency of Conflicts	1	-.27 (.10)	--
	2	-.35 (.04)	-.42 (.01)
Importance of Conflict	1	-.33 (.05)	--
	2	-.38 (.03)	-.49 (.02)
Intensity of Conflict	1	--	--
	2	-.36 (.04)	-.46 (.009)

[a] The number in parentheses is the probability value for the Pearson correlation (n = .26).

Personal similarity, on the other hand, was not associated with conflict in the first semester; even similar roommates experienced disagreements. By second semester, however, similar roommates were having fewer, less important disagreements. These findings support the expectation that personal similarity will smooth the way to harmonious interaction, but it is the interaction itself that determines the quality of the relationship.

Because the sample consists of college students, another way to interpret the changes across time is that by second semester these freshwomen students have settled into college life. They feel more in control of the academic parts of their life, and can now turn their attention to their relationship with their roommate. During the first semester, both compatible and incompatible roommates experienced conflict; by the second semester, those roommates who were more compatible began to deal more effectively with their roommate and to reduce their conflict, whereas those who were less compatible experienced an increase. This explanation takes the context of the relationship into consideration, which is important for a theory of relationship development.

Compatibility and problem-solving. The compatibility indices were only somewhat related to problem-solving strategies. It was initially assumed that compatibility

would be positively associated with joint problem-solving strategies, and negatively associated with unilateral strategies or avoidance. There was only limited support for this assumption. Roomates with a high Compatibility Ratio at Semester 1 or high Personal Similarity were signficantly less likely to rely on unilateral problem-solving strategies (-.40, $p < .02$; and -.49, $p < .005$, respectively). There was no indication, however, that they were more likely to use joint problem-solving or to avoid confrontation.

Compatibility and emotional involvement. Compatible roommates did show greater Emotional Involvement with their roommate, though only for second semester and only for the Compatibility Ratio (.44, $p < .01$). Roommates who rated themselves as low on Emotional Involvement (caring, self disclosure, attachment, uniqueness) were also less compatible.

On the emotional involvement subscales, the Compatibility Ratio was positively correlated with one's own caring (.32, $p < .06$) and one's own self-disclosure (.40, $p < .02$), but not with any of the other subscales (see earlier section for a discussion of the subscales).

Compatibility and satisfaction with the roommate. It was assumed that compatible roommates would rate themselves as more satisfied with their roommate than would

incompatible ones. This was supported in the second semester for the Compatibility Ratio (.29, $p < .07$) and Personal Similarity (.43, $p < .01$).

Compatibility and leisure time together. It was assumed that compatible roommates would spend more of their leisure time together than incompatible ones. This was supported on all three indices of compatibility, especially during Semester 1. It is interesting to note that those who are demographically or personally similar spend more time together during the first semester (.28, $p < .08$; .52, $p < .003$, respectively), but not the second; whereas the Compatibility Ratio predicts time together second semester as well as the first (Sem. 1 = ,37, $p < .03$; Sem. 2 = .33, $p < .05$). Over the long run, the quality of everyday interaction is more important than demographic factors in promoting interaction.

Year Two: The Future of the Roommate Relationship

Which roommates were most likely to continue to room together, and which were most satisfied with their new relationship? Pearson correlations were computed between the major variables in this study and a set of measures obtained by telephone interview during the second year. Out of the original 26 respondents, 19 were interviewed, and six were currently living together.

Continuing to live together was predicted from the Compatibility Ratio (.34, $p < .08$), from Personal Similarity (.37, $p < .06$), from Demographic Similarity (.32, $p < .09$); and from the Emotional Involvement score at each semester (.40, $p < .04$).

Emotional Involvement tended to predict future interaction better than Compatibility. Those high on Emotional Involvement were more likely to socialize together at home (.52, $p < .09$), to go out together socially (.73, $p < .001$), and they were less likely to get together for sports than those low in Emotional Involvement.

Demographic Similarity, although it did not relate well to first year measures, in general, did predict interaction in clubs (.32, $p < .09$) and (inversely) in sports (-.32, $p < .09$).

The less conflict overall, the more positive former roommates felt about their new relationship, and the more likely they were to get together socially. Those with high conflict were more likely to see their former roommate only in more structured activities, like sports activities or work.

Roommates who used joint conflict resolution strategies in their first year felt closer in their second year (.49, $p < .02$), and the more they avoided dealing with their conflicts, the less close they felt (-.33, p .09). There was no pattern for unilateral problem-solving.

To summarize, then, compatibility predicts certain outcomes, involvement or conflict others. Perhaps these distinctions could be drawn out in a future study in order to understand the various effects of compatibility versus emotional involvement or other variables.

Discussion

Summary of Findings

To review, a close relationship is one where there is frequent, diverse, long-lasting, and intense interaction (Kelley, et al., 1983). A compatible relationship is one where the partners facilitate each other's goals, and the ratio of facilitation to interference is high (Levinger & Rands, 1984). Closeness and compatibility are theoretically conceptually distinct relationship characteristics, although certain combinations of these characteristics may be more frequent than others in friendship.

This study measured some of the variables that could describe closeness and compatibility. Compatibility and personal similarity were related in predictable ways to involvement, conflict, conflict resolution, leisure time, living together in the future, and what roommates did together in year two.

The study also looked at developmental processes in roommate relationships. It showed that relationships do form quickly and that they are generally high in

compatibility (measured as degree of facilitation) and emotional involvement by the end of the first semester. Conflict, while it is fairly common, did not seem to become serious except in a few cases.

Contrary to our expectations, development across semesters shows that, on the average, roommate relationships become less positive across time (see for example Rands & Levinger, 1979). By second semester, roommates were less emotionally involved, showing an especially strong change in their perception of how much the roommate discloses, but also showing a strong trend to care less about the roommate and to believe the roommate cares less. Attachment and perceiving the relationship to be unique did not change.

Conflict increased during the second semester. Measures of the number of conflict areas, conflict frequency and importance showed tendencies to increase, whereas conflict intensity (a measure that combines importance and frequency) increased significantly. Important areas of conflict shifted somewhat by second semester. During first semester, roommates were concerned with room cleanliness, asking for favors and the nature of these favors, sharing things, using the phone, visits from friends or boyfriends, friends or boyfriends staying overnight, and the function of the room for studying or partying.

By second semester, roommates became more concerned with sleep or nap times, the function of the room, and spending time together. They became less concerned with decorating the room and with friends' visits. Certain conflicts, though rare, cause considerable difficulty; these are study hours, boyfriend's visits, boyfriends staying overnight, and types of friends.

Roommate compatibility helps predict the nature of changes in the second semester. Some roommates became less and some more compatible. By second semester, high compatibility was a good predictor of low conflict, high emotional involvement, more leisure time together, greater satisfaction with the roommate, and continuation of the relationship in the second year.

The Second Year

Wheaton alumnae frequently have intense memories of their roommate. In fact, Pillemer, Rhinehart, & White (in press) found that Wellesley alumnae recall relationship or events pertaining to relationships as their most salient memory from college years. Clearly this first experience is bound to be significant.

Nineteen of our roommates were interviewed in their second year. At that time, six (three pairs) were living together again. Of these six, two had gone to high school together and currently did everything together; two got along well and shared

some interests; and two had connecting singles and felt closer than last year, shared more important confidences, and were each other's best friend at Wheaton. Thirteen roommates were not living together; however, seven still felt close and spent a large amount of time together. Five considered themselves casual friends, and only one did not associate with her former roommate due to earlier tensions. Five former roommates had left Wheaton, and two were unavailable for interview.

In retrespect, then, the roommates generally felt positive about their former (and, in some cases, current) roommate. A followup is being planned in the fall of 1987 to assess changes since their sophomore year. An independent study of Wheaton Alumnae also asks about the former first year roommate. This information should enhance the findings from the present study.

Future Directions

This study was an attempt to look at relationship development across time, incorporating the new conceptual thinking of Kelley and his colleagues (Kelley et al., 1983; Huston & Robins, 1982). It also tested a new operational definition of compatibility, one based on partners' interaction. The findings showed logical and interpretable patterns. Some parts of the procedure need to be modified, however.

One problem is the high rate of attrition, a problem common to longitudinal studies. We were not able to pay respondents enough to motivate all of them to continue. Indeed, the discipline required to make weekly reports demands a certain level of intrinsic interest. The sample was chosen randomly, and by that criterion should be representative of the entire range of roommate relationships. It could be, however, that those roommates who refused to continue were experiencing the most conflict or didn't like each other well enough to try to get along. Analyses are planned to investigate this question.

A related problem refers in general to the retrospective memory task of the weekly reports; did respondents remember salient events accurately? It is an empirical question about the amount of reframing that occurs following an incident, especially if it affects the ego. Studies have shown that events where there is strong affect are likely to be remembered best (Robinson, 1976). In some ways this is an advantage to this study, because it ensures that feelings (as well as thoughts and behaviors) enter into evaluations of interaction sequences, making the measure more in keeping with the Kelley et al. (1983) formulation. In other ways, knowing that events of strong affect are likely to be recalled more frequently than those of low affect biases our picture of relationships. Indeed, relationships where there is harmonious, but affectively neutral, interaction may be desirable to some roommates.

A third problem, also related to the weekly event, is that some roommates did not complete their reports on time. In spite of having good tracking procedures (two research assistants each kept close contact with half of the pairs), some reports were submitted several weeks late. One wonders about the accuracy of memory and its selective distortion as respondents gain greater temporal and emotional distance on an interaction.

A fourth problem involves the timing of measures. The scales were administered over a number of weeks, so that roommates would not feel overwhelmed by the task, and we tried to control for such factors as not administering a conflict scale during exam week when tension was bound to be high and conflict level likely to be atypical. Such factors need to be considered.

This study could have been technically improved by adding more variables, though this would have added to the practical problems (the researcher's dilemma!). A daily journal record of interactions with the roommate, along with comments and interpretations, would provide more knowledge of the developmental process. Given the data collection problems of the simple weekly event report, however, this method seems even more vulnerable to procrastination or withdrawal from the experiment.

Another helpful addition would be to administer personality or attitude scales. Usually students find these tasks interesting, so perhaps adding them to the study would not be too problemmatic. For example, there was no way to test attitude similarity hypotheses or whether attitudes become more similar across the semesters (e.g., Byrne, 1971; Newcomb, 1961). An Attitudes Toward Women survey (Spence & Helmreich, 1978) would have given the chance to test, in an essentially feminist environment, the correlates of having profeminine attitudes.

Finally, the roommate relationship does not develop in isolation. Friends, classmates, teachers, former friends, and family are all important. To truly understand the development of roommate relationships, we would need to know something about each partner's social network and the changes that are created in that network when new friends are added (Milardo, 1982; Rands, in press).

This study was a first effort toward measuring compatibility. The calculation of the Compatibility Ratio itself, aside from the issue of collecting data about events, needs to be reconsidered. For example, in this analysis, neutral events were dropped, and only those events that were positive or negative were incorporated into the ratio. Theoretically, a neutral event could be facilitating, in that interaction runs smoothly, but unremarkably. It was difficult to find a way to incorporate

neutral events: perhaps a scale without a neutral point could be used; perhaps neutral events could be added in with positive events; or perhaps events could be weighted differently.

Finally, this technique needs to be tried with larger and different samples. A larger sample would give us more confidence in the findings, as well as allow more sophisticated regression analyses to uncover the causal paths in these data. Other samples could test for the usefulness of the measure for relationships varying in duration, closeness, sex or age composition, role relationships, temporary versus permanent relationships, and so on.

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Figure Captions

Figure 1. Roommate Emotional Involvement across two semesters.

Figure 2. Roommate Conflict across two semesters.

Appendix I

Involvement Scale

OWN CARING FOR ROOMMATE

1. When ___ is feeling bad, I try to make her feel better.
12. I am responsive to ___'s emotional needs.
15. I would do almost anything for ___.
18. I feel concern for ___'s well-being.

ROOMMATE'S CARING FOR ME

4. ___ is very responsive to my emotional needs.
7. ___ When I am feeling bad, ___ tries to make me feel better.
16. ___ feels concern for my well-being.
22. ___ would do almost anything for me.

OWN DISCLOSURE

3. There is nothing important that ___ doesn't know about me.
6. I feel I can confide in ___ about virtually everything.
9. I feel comfortable telling ___ my personal thoughts and feelings.
14. I feel entirely safe in telling ___ about my weaknesses.

ROOMMATE'S DISCLOSURE

11. ___ feels comfortable telling me her personal thoughts and feelings.
12. ___ feels she can confide in me about virtually everything.
21. ___ feels entirely safe in telling me her weaknesses.

ATTACHMENT

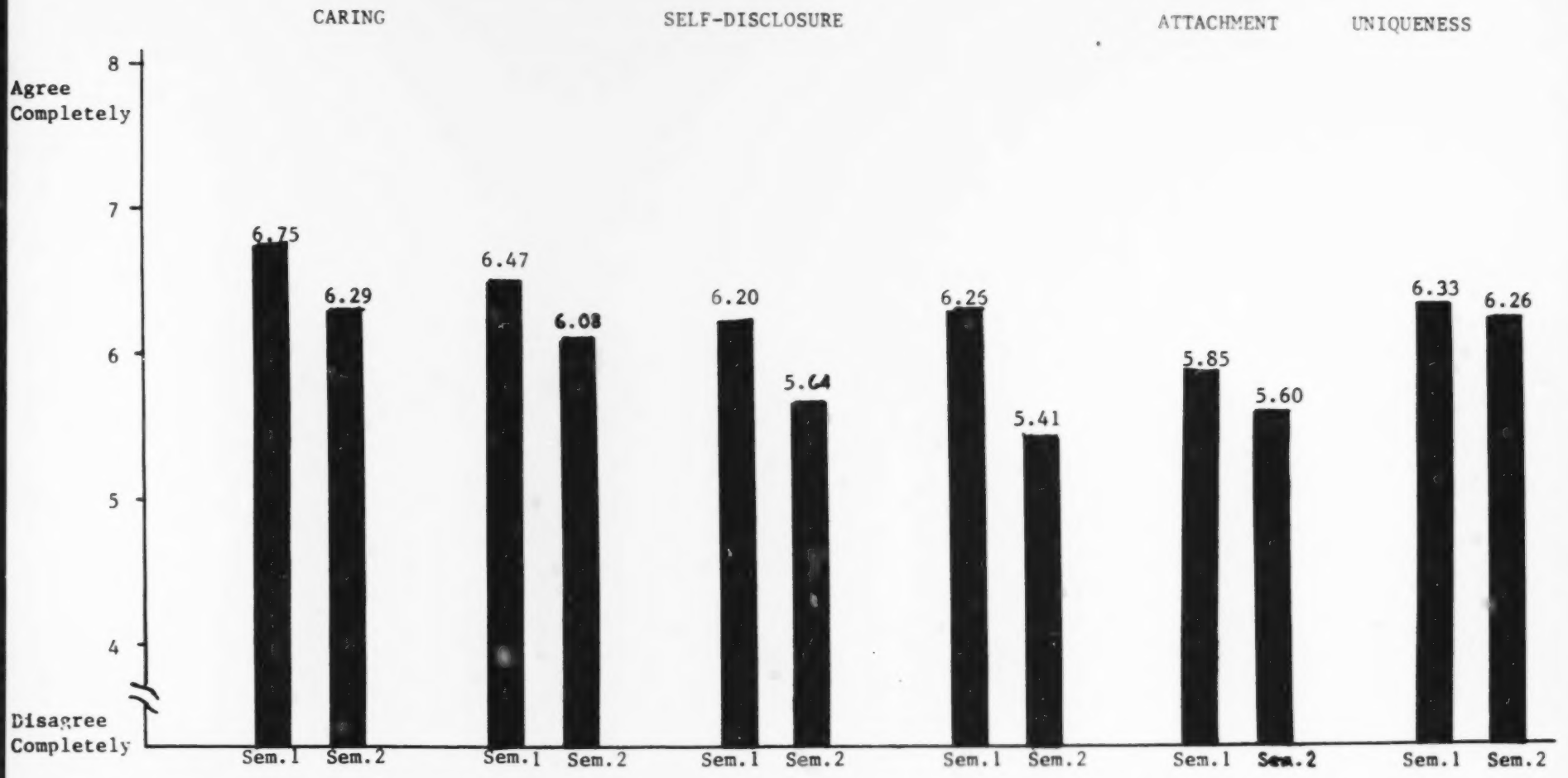
2. If ___ were lonely, she would turn to me.
5. If I were lonely, I would turn to ___.

UNIQUENESS OF RELATIONSHIP

8. There is something special about our relationship.
19. ___ is a very prominent part of my life.
20. My special moments with ___ have been unique.

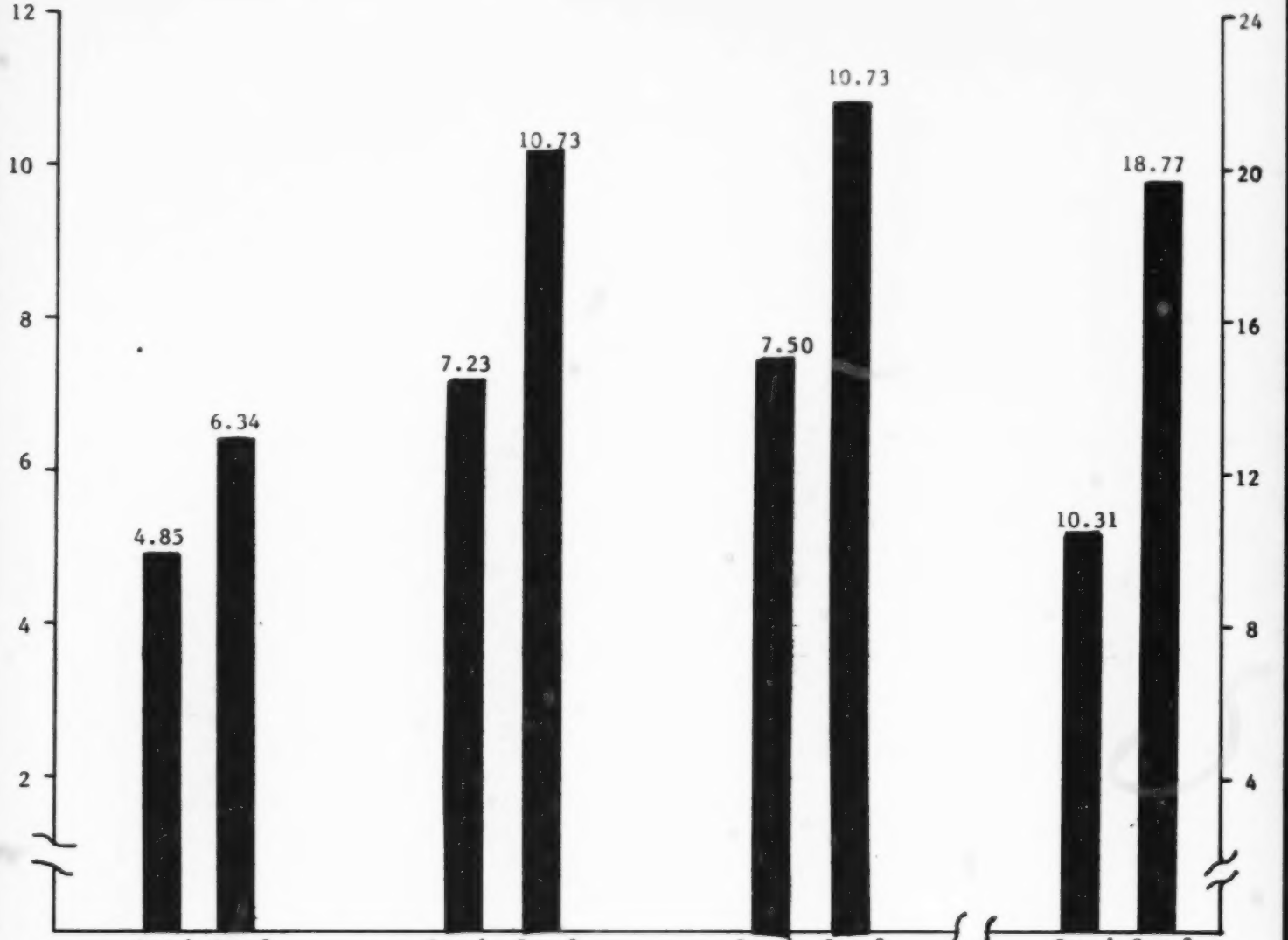
EMOTIONAL INVOLVEMENT

N=26



p<.07	p<.12	p < .09	p= < .001	n.s	n.s

CONFLICT



	Sem.1	Sem.2	Sem.1	Sem.2	Sem.1	Sem.2	Sem.1	Sem.2
S	5.28	7.47	11.53	14.67	8.88	12.74	18.41	26.37
	Types		Frequency		Importance		Intensity	
	p=<.13		P<.08		p=<.11		p=<.03	
Range	(0-24)		(0-96)		(0-72)		(0-288)	